

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
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**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
LAWRENCE**

**INFORMANT: FRANK CURRIER
INTERVIEWER: YILDEREY ERDENER
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**F = FRANK
Y = YILDEREY**

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Interview begins with Frank in mid-sentence:

F: They were over in Bradford Street by the church. And they would have, they had a place out at Forest Lake, which was Welch's Pond, and they'd have a big outing over there. Outings were a big thing uh, where there you'd go. And naturally the beer was a come on, and the dancing, and the food. You could see it was, you'd spend all Sunday afternoon there. And many of the politicians who were running for office would, it was quite common then that they would have their outings. And you would go there and you would get free sodas, and hotdogs, and so forth. It was quite a thing to go to the outings.

Y: Which one did you go?

F: I used to go to uh, see, there again as I say, we familiarize ourself. We didn't say, the Irish stuck with the Irish. I used to go over with the Lithuanians, and go out to the park with them. My neighbor, the boy I chummed with was a Lithuanian fellow. And he would come down. Any activities I had at Saint Patrick's, I would go over with him. And there was none of this you know, friction between them. No, we seemed to blend in quite well.

Y: But you formerly belong to Irish, or?

F: Irish, yeah, over in Saint Patrick's, the Irish section, yeah.

Y: Which one did your father [unclear?]

F: He was Saint Patrick's, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Y: And uh, besides, huh?

F: And up above of course, was the French. The Sacred Heart area was all French. And they had their own clubs up there and everything else.

Y: Yeah, beside the socializing, what else did they do?

F: It was not a great deal, because as I said before, the radios began to come in, and then you would uh, of an evening, have you dinner and all go in to the what they called a parlor at that time. And sit down and (--)

Y: What did they call it?

F: The parlor.

Y: Oh yeah.

F: And sit down. And a certain time, the radio wasn't on all day long. You'd uh, father would go in and turn the radio on and we'd listen to the uh, they gave a little news or something. And they'd be little sketches that they would have on. Then that developed over the years that national tie-ups would come in, like say the Fleischman hour would be in the craft music hour and so forth. And we would sit all evening and listen to the radio and enjoy it. It was terrific. And then they would have mysteries on, you know. Programs like the "Shadow" and so forth. We'd sit around and listen to that.

Y: The question, the reason why I asked, was I thought some of them tried to teach the language. Like Lithuanians, or Italians. Did they teach Italian language, or was it earlier?

F: Well when the immigrant came into the city, they were clannish. The Italians were here on Essex Street, that Holy Rosie Church. They had their own school, they had their own social club. And although they were, they still maintained their ethnic background, that is to say they made sure the children didn't forget their language and so forth. And the same way with German people, and the French and so forth. They had their French schools, and people could (--) Still the French would send their children to the French School, and they'd learn French and English, and still didn't forget their background. And see the objective, the difference I see then and today is, the immigrant that came in there had one thing on their mind, is to become an American Citizen. The high school would be opened nights. The Oliver School was opened nights so that the Italian, and the German, and the French, and whoever it was could go over there and learn English.

Y: [Comment unclear]

F: The year? (Y: Yeah) Oh these were the earlier years. I mean we're from the, in the 20's and 30's. (Y: I mean, but you say the schools) And 40's. (Y: 30's, umhm) And uh, they would learn sufficient amount of English, that they would go and, for the test for their, become American citizens. (Y: umhm) And that was their main objective, is to(--) And then they would raise their children you know, the customs and according to the customs of the day. That

was a good blend. They blended in very well. Of course they had friction I'm sure. They're be little squabbles between the Irish and the French over there in South Lawrence. And you'd have it with the Italians and so forth, downtown. But nothing too, of major distraction at all. I mean they seem to take care of their own in other words.

Y: So that's where they learned the language I guess. That function disappeared somehow.

F: They used to, and anyone that went to work in the mills, and wanted to continue with their education, there used to be night high, night high school.

Y: Oh, they could do that?

F: Yes, yeah.

Y: Um. And since you know about this city so well, can you tell me a little bit about how the ethnic groups, where did they live? Like the Irish, where did they live most of them. Although it changed later, and then people moved out.

F: I was born and raised in the South side of the city. And in that area there was predominantly Irish and French. Irish in the Saint Patrick's area around Salem Street, and over to Andover street, and so forth. And the Irish was in that area, Union Street.

Y: Union, not Andover? What?

F: Andover Street, Union Street, South Broadway, Salem Street, south of the river, see. And then the French would be up around Groton Street, Inman Street, Farley, Brookfield and so forth. And they centered around the Church, and they went to uh, around there. And over in the North side of the city they had the French in around Saint Anne's Church, the Irish were over on Saint Mary's. There's a German church on the corner of Park Street, and Lawrence Street, because [unclear] Hall was right in that area too. There's the Greeks were up on the other end of Essex Street. The Italians were down here on this end of Essex Street, on Essex and Union. And they, they had their different areas in the city, and uh, (--)

Y: Yeah. So but it changed later, right? I mean they did not stick to that neighborhood. So gradually they moved on?

F: Well they began to infiltrate into other areas as the children grew up and became married. They intermarried and so forth, and moved around the city, and blended in so it became like homogenized type of living that you know, everybody just blended right in.

Y: And uh, when the mills closed, where were you?

F: Let's see, the mills (--)

Y: '53 and '54. Early 50's.

F: I uh, was with, when I got out of high school and so forth, at that time I didn't, I wanted to get into something that had a little more promising future to it. The mills as I had mentioned to you would get an order completed. If it was a big order you'd work throughout the, you worked six months, or nine months, whatever it was. When the order was completed the work was done. They sort of phased you out so that they kept a steady, the third shift would go off, the second shift would be dropped and so forth. And we would, I wanted to get something with a little more security to me, and for me. So that Howard Johnson at that time was to the young fellow, or person, getting out of school what McDonald's is to them today. They were a franchise in business. So I became affiliated with that company and worked my way right up into a supervisor, and worked for Howard Johnson's. (Y: In uh, Howard Johnson's?) And worked for them, oh, ten or twelve years opening different territories, and managing places for them. And that was during, right after the war too. Then I wanted to go into business for myself. And I went and took state board exams for the civil service and so forth. And finally got out of that and into the Health and Sanitation Program, where I worked for a private company for a number of years as a health officer and sanitarian.

Y: It's incredible how much, how many different things you did. I mean starting in the mills, you moved from one to another.

F: Well more or less people, the later years could read in between the lines that the textile era in the city of Lawrence was coming to an end. So uh (--)

Y: Did you hear about (--)

F: Well it was generally felt throughout the city, yeah, and rumors and so forth, that the mills were closing down. And once they closed you never knew when they were going to open again. And the next thing you knew, they were heading south. The south took and enticed them there, because they not only built new plants, but they gave them immunity on taxes for a number of years. That was a reason for them to head south. I imagine too, the machinery in the mills were there for a number of years, and about this time progress were being made in the polyester, so forth. A new machine was needed for that. And rather than try to go on with what they had here, it looked good to move south, get, receive the benefits of the tax free program, and to install new machinery. And the south took over the textile industry. So you kind of went out into what might be available. Right after the war, and during the war years, the high tech began to come into its own uh, 128 up there began to be a center for uh(--) Graduates came out of MIT, or from the Technical Institutions, many of them went out on their own to develop and get into the computer business. And a lot of them went into to that. I never got involved in the high tech industry at all. I went into the other branch, but I was into the more or less, the health sanitation scene.

Y: So you were in Lawrence when, early 1950's?

F: Yes, yeah.

Y: How did you see it from outside? I mean what was your impression? What did people do? Some of them say their whole street was unemployed, because most of them were working.

F: Were Textile workers, and it was like people maneuvering for position you might say. Where can I best fit in? Where would I best be fitted in, and what jobs are there available? What opportunities are available? That is why many of them went into, as my sister did, Federal Government put Internal Revenue Service in Andover. That absorbed a lot of the people in this area. And they went into the Internal Revenue Service. Then the technology began to come in. Honeywell moved in, and Raytheon, and that picked up the slack to of a lot of people going into, into those industries.

Y: Western Electric?

F: Western moved into North Andover, the Merrimack Valley Division of Western Electric. And that was a boost to the area too. People went there and worked for Western Electric. Yeah, there was, a lot of a little of the smaller shops came in to the area. I can remember in the Everett Mills they began to make radios there. Pilot Radio was there for awhile. They made the Pilot radios in the Everett Mill, yeah. People went there and learned how to you know, make the uh, the tubes of the coils, whatever you called them, and did the soldering and so forth.

Y: And of course from the Wood Mill, what is it, Merrimack, Merrimack Street I think. (F: Yes, Merrimack) There were, there were lots of buildings. And someone told me that there were restaurants, and they used to sell food there. Do you remember those things? Or here, Methuen Street, and South Union Street, at the corner there's a building. Someone told me that it was called something. They used to sell food. And after the Wood Mill and those mills closed down, they also closed down.

F: Yeah, there were a number of little restaurants that would spring up around the mills, because people would take the lunch to the mills. They'd prepare it the night before and they would take their lunch to the mill, because the mill did provide what they called heating ovens, the steam ovens, that you could put your food in these ovens. Say um, you're going to have, say the mill, twelve o'clock, you might put it in at 11:30 so it would heat up, and you'd go in at 12:00 and get your food out, it was hot. People that did not want to bring their lunch, uh, would go. There was any number of little restaurants used to spring up around the mills, and they would go there and have their lunch.

Y: Steam, what did they call it?

F: Steam ovens. Yeah. Yeah. They would be, I remember Shawsheen, it would be similar to this cabinet here, two tier, but much larger. And you might have brought a jar of uh, let's say beef stew, or spaghetti, or something. And it was cool, and you put it in there, and at uh, in a half hour or so it was a steam oven. The mills had it connected to live steam, you know, and it would heat up. And you'd go and get it, and it was heated for your lunch, see?

Y: Yeah. What about the ice box? Which reminds me of the (--) When you were in 1935, in those days there wasn't any refrigerators.

F: No refrigerators. No, everything was the ice box. The ice man would come and deliver to

the house, you know, carry the ice into the house and put it into the ice box for you. It had the tongs, they called it, put the ice over his shoulder. He had a sort of a rubberized mat on his shoulder, and he would carry that into the house, and upstairs, and put it in the ice box.

Y: Where did they get the ice? Where did they cut it, and uh, do you know anything about those things?

F: Yes. The Merrimack River would freeze over. We don't get that today, but the Merrimack River then would freeze over. And the ice house, the Lawrence Ice Company was located on Water Street, here near the falls. And Toy Brothers Ice House was located down on the south side of the city where the boating ramp is now. And they would cut the ice in the wintertime, and bring it down to the ice houses, put it on the shutes that would, it was adjustable, so they would put the ice on the first floor, and put the hay over it, raise the shute up over the first layer of ice, pack that one and keep going up and up with it till they fill the ice house. And then in the summertime, in the spring, the ice men used to go there and load their wagons with ice and deliver it to the houses on the streets. You could hear him. He had a bell, would ring, the ice man is here.

Y: Well they ran a bell?

F: Yeah, they ran. Or they would have, have a card and would be a letter on it. Now say T would be Toy Brothers. Well that fellow would know that these people wanted ice, but it belonged to him, you see what I mean? See? Someone else might have another letter for another company ice man, see? And he saw that, he would stop his wagon and come up. Because knowing what you wanted, he almost knew that each, every other day you might take a .25 piece of ice. So he'd see the card you needed ice, he'd take it right up to you, see?

Y: I see a tractor, it's called Bresner?

F: Oh, Bresnerhan. (Y: Bresnerhan) Oh, he's located over on the south side of the city there on, on the junction of 114 Union Street. He uh, is an ice distributor. I guess he sells a lot of dry ice.

Y: Yeah, he does, but I was wondering if he was one of the old companies.

F: No, he never manufactured ice. He was not(--) Then he went into ice vending, that is when they packaged the ice and filled up vending machines. There was a place over in South Lawrence, they used to call the every pure ice company where they manufactured ice, one of the first around. When the river wasn't freezing as well, or didn't produce the ice, that the winter might have been a milder type of winter, and the ice production wasn't as good. So they built this place, Ever Pure Ice Company over in River Road in South Lawrence, and they would manufacture the ice. And uh, that is where they would go and get the big blocks of ice.

Y: And so we are going to quit, because both of us are tired. But uh, so in those days people went to the movies, and they went dancing, you went beaches. Well that was the [unclear] leisure time [unclear]?

F: Yes, leisure time. And there used to be a place over in South Lawrence, the Lawrence Canoe Club. It was a big club there, and people would uh, sports minded people would go out in the afternoon, rent a canoe and go out on the river paddling on the canoe. Upstairs they also held weekly dances there in the canoe club.

Y: What about other things like uh, things, um, um (--) (F: bowling) Bowling, was it a big sport?

F: Bowling, yeah, that's when the recreation ball, recreation building was built. The dance hall was upstairs, and the bowling alleys were downstairs. That was another form of recreation, going bowling. Yeah, that was (--)

Y: And what about baseball and things like that?

F: Baseball was also popular, because different mills and so forth would have their own clubs. And uh, they'd compete against one another, have a baseball game. Lawrence at one time had quite a popular baseball game known as the Lawrence Independence. That was the beginning, or the fore runner of the major league baseball, because some of the men that were, that played in that went over into, I don't know the fellows name. He was a catcher for the Lawrence Independence. And when the, he went into Boston and played for the Boston Braves. That's before they sold out to, I guess they sold to Milwaukee, and Milwaukee sold them out to Atlanta, that Turner now owns them. But baseball was very popular. Uh, there used to be football too, because Lawrence High School was competing against Lowell and Haverhill. And the other nearby cities and towns was, Football was very popular. Lawrence had a professional football team. I think it was the Lawrence Steam Rollers at the time. And they were fellows that played, that went to college, and came back from college and performed this football team, and played football. There was (--)

Y: Yeah, did you meet your wife at the dancing?

F: No, while I was going to high school I worked afternoon in a, on a soda fountain. And she worked in a Five and Ten named Kresce's, which was on the diagonal side of the street. And she and a couple of the girls would come in at lunch time, or in the afternoon to get a sandwich. And that's how I met her there. She uh, and we used to go and got quite friendly with them, you know, and familiar with them, and enough to ask him uh, say, I would say "gee, so and so, my friend and I are going up to Canobie Lake Wednesday night to the dance, are you girls going up? Why don't you come along with us?" Or we'd meet you there, or something, if we weren't too friendly. Then after that we used to take them up ourselves, because Wednesday afternoons in Lawrence the stores would close, but they'd be opened Tuesday nights, see? Tuesday nights, and Saturday nights are big nights in Lawrence. You had all you can do to walk down the street, and not uh, you couldn't walk, you had to follow the crowds that were moving, it was so dense. So many people in the streets.

Y: Why did they open to (--)

F: Well see, they opened Tuesday nights, and gave the clerks Wednesday afternoons off. They still adhere to that today, certain stores. A matter of fact, the banks close on Wednesday. The professional offices still close on Wednesday.

Y: I noticed that too, yeah.

F: Yeah.

Y: So that was the reason to uh (--)

F: Yeah, they worked the night before, Tuesday night, so they gave them Wednesday afternoons off. And that's when we used to say to the girls, you know, are you going to the dance Wednesday night? And then Friday night we'd always head out to one of the nearby dances too, like Canobie Lake, or Lowell, or the recreation in Lawrence at the Casino in Hampton Beach.

Y: Yeah. You have one daughter?

F: I have one daughter and two sons.

Y: Oh, I thought you have one daughter.

F: My oldest son is uh, graduated from the University of New Hampshire, but he worked for [unclear] in Boston, and photographic supplies and so forth, a big major company in Boston, but he uh, rather work on cars. He was always mechanically inclined, and he opened his own garage and didn't, does restitution on reviving old cars, rebuilding them and so forth, see. Reconstructing.

Y: Where does he work now?

F: He has his own garage.

Y: Lawrence?

F: Amesbury. And the other fellow is uh, he went to Law School. He's a lawyer. He's a Senior Legal Legislative Advisor for United States Postal Department. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia. And my daughter is a school teacher. She's got her Master's Degree in education. She teaches school.

Y: You said in your sons office he had something on his desk? You mentioned once, something, I don't remember exactly what it was. Um, you know, you told me an expression you heard from your father once. On shoulders, something with shoulders. I wrote it down somewhere.

F: Oh yeah, my father, a great expression of his. He always wanted us to get as much education as we could. Uh, there's always time for work, there's time for play, but get your education. Because he always said, you never get round shouldered carrying an education. (Y: round?)

You never get round shouldered carrying an education. So that's why, that was a favorite expression of his. You know, if it meant going to school at night, go to school. You know what I mean? You know.

Y: There was something else with folder, and uh (--) I think I wrote it down, but uh (--) But anyway, it was very interesting to talk. And we both are tired. It is not easy you know, to follow what you say for example. If I don't listen careful and I ask questions again, and again, anyway, that was the end of the tape, and uh, thank you so much.

F: Well I enjoyed it, and I don't mind. I enjoyed it, and I don't mind going back and reminiscing, you know, it kind of (--)

End of tape.